



freshwaysforward

∞ Discovering You

December 2008

Taking stock of 2008: the useful and not so useful ways of reviewing the year

If I asked you how your year has been, would you answer, "Great thanks, I've achieved a lot, my family is happy, life is good", or "Well, I can't believe it's nearly Christmas. I still haven't got x project out of the way, my year-end accounts still need finishing, and I wish I'd paid more off the mortgage by now"? If it would have been the latter, notice how different that feels to the first response.

What if I told you that both responses could be true for the same person? There probably isn't a soul around that doesn't still have a few things yet to be done. So which is the most useful to pay attention to? That depends. If you want to feel energised, ready for achieving more, relaxed and healthy, it is best to take stock of what you have achieved and what has gone well (the first version!).

This is not Pollyanna thinking (and maybe she was right anyway), it is simply focusing our attention (and thereby channelling our energy) in a useful way. Throughout this year I've been writing and speaking about overcoming depression. What has this got to do with taking stock of this year? One of the world's foremost experts on overcoming depression, Dr Michael Yapkos' research tells us that one of the patterns of depression is noticing what's not gone well and what we don't have, rather than noticing what is going well and what we do have. This is no small thing. It makes the difference between happiness and unhappiness.

Martin Seligman is also known around the world, but in his case it is for being a "happiness" expert. Sound corny? Well if happiness is the opposite of depression, maybe it's not so corny after all. Seligman originally began studying depression until he realised it wasn't helping him learn how *not* to do depression. Hence his focus is now on *how to do happiness*.

Now, you may be thinking, isn't it helpful to check for what you haven't done yet, what happened that you wouldn't want to repeat? Yes, it is certainly useful to learn from our experience. The difference is treating it like feedback, rather than failure. In business, checking for problems can be highly appropriate. I worked for KPMG for a number of years and they specialise in this. They provide auditing services and therefore their staff are excellent at checking for issues and problems. This is how they help their clients meet standards and legislation. A friend of mine is an air traffic controller and likewise, she must look out for problems, issues and ensure everything is running absolutely perfectly to guarantee the safety of many people. In a high risk environment, focusing on issues and potential problems is useful and important.

However, life is not quite like that. Our life isn't about risk management. Nor does it need constant auditing. Most of all, life is to be enjoyed and celebrated.



God, grant me the
serenity to accept the
things I cannot change,
the courage to change
the things I can,
and the wisdom to know
the difference.

Reinhold Niebuhr



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How do you do happiness?

Seligman describes the emotions that cause us to experience happiness, whether we are thinking about the past, present or future. There are certain ways of accessing those emotions, and here's how it works:

When you think about the past:

Appreciate what you've achieved, overcome and what you feel grateful for -> Satisfaction

Accept you did your best, appreciate what you have had -> Contentment

Recognise your qualities, efforts and achievements -> Pride

Accept what you cannot change -> Serenity

When you think about the future:

Trust that good things happen -> Optimism

Allow yourself to dream -> Hope

Remind yourself of all your skills, abilities and experience -> Confidence

Practice trusting that things will be as they should be -> Trust

Practice trusting that things will be as they should be -> Faith

In the present:

Happiness comes from immersing yourself in tastes, touch, sensations, tingles, beautiful sounds, bubbling giggles, making love. Pavlova in your mouth, sun on your face, a baby in your arms, a passionate kiss (what Seligman calls bodily pleasures).

Happiness comes from feeling glee, amusement, love, excitement, gratitude, etc etc *in the moment* (what Seligman calls higher pleasures).

If any of these don't feel easy to do yet, pretend them. Pretend you believe good things happen. It will work just the same.

Which of these do you already do? Which ones would you like to do more of? It is certainly worth pondering as you're lying on the beach or relaxing in your backyard over the holidays.

In short, it's useful to:

- Remember that we don't just have happiness, we *do* it
- Appreciate what you have (within you, materially and spiritually)
- Use the past as a helpful reminder and then let go
- Be in the moment – soak up life, in *now*



Remembering

Six of my dear friends lost a parent or partner this year. In four cases it was sudden and unexpected. It certainly makes us take stock and appreciate our friends and family.

Take time with your loved ones over Christmas and the summer months. Cherish them, faults, foibles and all.



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Watch: Young at Heart

[Young at Heart](#) follows a group of elderly singers in America known for their renditions of the Rolling Stones, James Brown, Talking Heads, other rock classics, even the odd punk classic! Moving, hilarious and ever so real, it is an absolute delight. On at Rialto now.

Read: The True Power of Water by Masuro Emoto

I believe this book could have been called the true power of thoughts. It is fascinating research about the effect of certain words or intentions on water, and so much more than that. My question to you when you read it is, if placing loving intention on water creates such beauty, what would happen if we placed that intention on our own selves? Our own bodies when they need to be healed? On [Amazon](#).



Media

November was an exciting month of media activity, with a client success story on [Campbell Live](#) on the 17th and then an interview with Dr Richard Bolstad on PlanetFM on the 18th talking about overcoming depression. [Healthy Options](#) in November featured one of my articles on healing depression through NLP. Click the links to see, read or hear any of these if you missed them - the radio interview will be on the website within the next week or so.

This month's Good magazine some of my approaches to New Year's resolutions. Look out for 'Good' in bookstores now, it's a great read.

"I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six.

Mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked for my autograph."

Shirley Temple